

Roberts captured soul of S.C.

Continued from page 10A

a poster advertising "perfect pictures."

A self-taught photographer reared in Florida, Roberts moved his family to South Carolina in the early '20s. He and his wife, Wilhelmina Pearl Williams Roberts, a native of Columbia, left after her health began to decline. She suffered in the high Florida humidity, Wynn said. They bought a five-bedroom house on Wayne Street for \$3,000. In 1922, he opened the studio.

From 4 a.m. to noon, Roberts toiled as janitor at the local Post Office, one of the first blacks to be employed there.

At noon, he opened his studio - photographing the Talented Tenth and the "burden bearers," Columbia's cadre of black maids, butlers and skilled and unskilled laborers.

"People came from everywhere," Wynn said. "There were people who were chefs and worked in white people's kitchens. There was a great diversity."

For Wynn and her siblings the studio was magic.

"There was a picture of me above the door," Wynn said. "In

those days, color had to be applied. He painted it pink."

Wynn had assistants who were photographers, but he did most of the pictures himself, often working late into the night to accommodate clients.

His wife was also a fine photographer.

"Mother took pictures, too," Wynn said. "Her works were featured in a book by photographer Jean Montoussamy Ashe. Mother was a strong woman. She always said 'don't step on my church or my children.'"

Black Columbia relied on Roberts to capture everything on film. Photos were affordable. The most expensive was \$2.50 - the least \$1.25. Three postcards were a \$1.

"Father tried to make sure everyone was happy," Wynn said. "He wouldn't accept any payment until his customers were satisfied. He would take one picture the person wanted and he wanted. People generally took the one he wanted. Black



Portrait of an unidentified deceased child, around 1920s.

people would sometimes go to the white photographers but they acknowledged the pictures weren't as good."

He took pictures of joys, but also sorrows. He traveled around South Carolina photographing funerals. It is those pictures that move Wynn most.

"Back then a lot of times people didn't have money to have pictures made," she said. "In order to have a picture of a loved one, they would have them photographed in the casket. A lot of

people today think that is morbid. But that is the way it was then."

The finding of the photographs and creation of the book and exhibit are keep her father's spirit alive, Wynn said.

"People saw photos of themselves as children and of their relatives," she said. "The project brought families together."

"He was really important. It just took 60 years to see it."

Youngest contestants make news

By Amy Starnes
THE ANDERSON
HERALD-BULLETIN

ANDERSON, Ind. - Laken Goff is a beauty queen. To prove it, she has a 5-foot trophy, a tiara as tall as her face is long, and a sapphire and diamond ring. She is 3 years old.

With the death of child beauty pageant winner JonBenet Ramsey, America knows well the face of the Colorado 6-year-old with the hair and make-up of a 24-year-old.

The pictures seem endless - JonBenet in a backless outfit; JonBenet with hair extensions; JonBenet as Vegas showgirl.

"Those pictures of JonBenet bothered me immediately. I thought I was the only person in the U.S. sitting here thinking, 'Oh my gosh, what are they doing to her?'" said Marcia Summers, professor of education psychology at Ball State University.

Summers has since found she is not alone. The pictures have turned the public's attention to the business of child beauty pageants.

But some local pageant moms point out the benefits of the contests and the differences between pageants in the West and South and those in the Midwest.

With a hot-pink bow in her hair, playful brown eyes and mischievous smile, Laken Goff hangs onto her mini shopping cart full of fake food.

She chews on the end of a plastic banana as her parents talk about her newfound life on the pageant circuit.

This 3-year-old has a portfolio, an occasional modeling coach in Ohio and a runway/stage (built by her father) to play on.

Laken's mother, Beth, was involved with pageants when she was younger and has been a pageant judge for contests in several states. She said when Laken saw a pageant she was judging one day, the little girl wanted to be on the stage.

Since then, Laken has been in eight pageants and brought home about a dozen trophies and crowns. Pageants are set up by age category and some take babies as young as 1 week old.

As the child gets older, they are asked to speak, give an interview and eventually compete in a talent competition.

Winners of preliminaries can advance to "nationals," but they aren't really national, they are more like regional.

Children can compete in a number of different sections - prettiest hair, best portfolio, costume, etc.

Every child gets a trophy, and on the national level the winners often get savings bonds for college, jewelry and toys.

"She likes to do it," Goff said of Laken. "I think it gives her good self-esteem. How many 3-year-olds can take a microphone and talk in front of 300 people? ... If she ever said she didn't want to do it, I wouldn't make her."

Goff said she hopes pageants will give her daughter self-confidence and perhaps allow her to make a few friends.

"I'm not out for her to win thousands of dollars.

Hopefully, the money we put into it is going to pay off."

About the pictures of a dolled-up JonBenet Ramsey, Goff said, "You're not going to see anything like that around here."

Here, little girls wear puffy, beaded dresses and their costume may be a homemade scarecrow outfit.

Not that the pageants aren't expensive: From the dresses to the entrance fees, parents can spend several hundred dollars on a national competition.

That does not include portfolios, coaches, modeling lessons and any other accessories. Laken competes in a \$300 white dress that was store-bought, but later embellished by hand with pearls.

The dress is a far cry from some \$1,000 dresses on sale at national pageants, but still much more than what some pageant moms spend.

Likewise, lip gloss is Laken's only makeup. She doesn't compete with "big hair," no backless or skimpy outfits and no taking off her jacket and swinging it over her shoulder, her mother said.

She says the children are not being pushed to grow up too fast, as some may claim.

"She's got her hair in curls, but how many girls get their hair in curls and a big frilly dress on to go to church on Easter and Christmas?"

But there are exceptions and extremes. Peggy Dellinger, owner of Nana's Consignment Shop, and her daughter, Diane Filbrun, work the pageant circuit as judges.

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